

the ma(r)king of memory & the right to remember

DESIGN, INTERPRETATION
& THE MOVEMENT OF MEANING

An investigation into the role of design in shaping Euro-Western experience &
interpretation of the post genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda

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By Shannon Davis
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abstract

Bearing witness to tragedy, the aftermath of genocide often resides quite evidently within the landscape. A potent container of memories and representation, the landscape provides both a symbolic role in which to honour the victims and give survivors a place to mourn and remember, but is also often infused with the tensions of post-genocide life.

The memoryscapes of the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides illustrate these contested concerns explicitly. The case study sites investigated in this study - the *Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum* and the *Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre* in Cambodia, and the *Kigali Memorial Centre* in Rwanda - each express today (consciously or unconsciously) design strategies that engage the Euro-Western visitor. Termed Euro-Western 'cues to connect', encountered and existential phenomenological data is analysed in relation to design interpretation and the affective cognition of meaning.

Finally, considered in relation to Berlin's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, post genocide memorialisation is analysed in its ability to connect through time and culture - through its ability to transpose interpretations and evolve as the needs of society change.

KEY WORDS

Genocide – Globalisation – Tourism - Memorialisation - Memorial – Memorial Design — Site – Site Design - Experience – Interpretation.

In undertaking research such as this, many people have questioned why I, a landscape architecture student from New Zealand would be impelled to explore such a tragic topic. Genocide is an incomprehensible tragedy that continues to plague the human race and test the boundaries of our ‘civilized’ human culture. It is a situation that persists throughout our modern ‘globalised’ world, attacking communities and people, without order, expectation or prediction. New Zealand offers separation - a type of physical dislocation that provides an opportunity for objective perspective and free thought. We are all part of a world where genocide occurs, and we are also part of a world where, with the increase in communication and popular knowledge, ordinary people become sufficiently aware of events in the larger context, therefore able to assume personal responsibility for history. Genocide is no longer considered a civil or tribal problem that happens somewhere other than here. Genocide is a human problem – a human tragedy.

In one instance, I feel this research to be completely inadequate, to be too late. Focused in the aftermath, should our efforts be not in the direct prevention of such tragedy, in trying to understand the process that leads to genocide? This research however does offer, I believe, an important discussion. Considered within the premise that the purpose of genocide memorials is to firstly honor the victims and those directly affected by genocide, but also imperatively, to engage future generations and those who did not experience the tragedy first-hand, a better understanding of the *design, experience* and subsequent *interpretations* of post genocide memoryscapes are, I believe, vitally important to the greater discussion of understanding the connection between man and meaning in the landscape – and perhaps also, contributing to the global discussion on strategies that may aid the prevention of genocide.

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